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## XX.—THE TEXTS MOST USED IN THE TEACHING OF OLD FRENCH.

An inquiry into the texts most in use for the teaching of Old French in the best universities cannot help having a certain pedagogical interest. The value of such an inquiry would be greater, if we possessed a similar investigation made fifteen or twenty years ago. Although no such investigation is recorded, it is nonetheless fitting and important to set down here the results of a recent inquiry into this question.

For seventy-five years, our knowledge of the language and literature of Old French have been, on the whole, steadily increasing. A larger and larger number of the elect in all civilized countries have found here an admirable field for philological research or a new world of poetic beauty, or both. The labors of three generations of scholars have endowed human thought and feeling with a new literature, whose fulness of development may well excite surprise, and whose monuments, so long neglected, furnish us by far the most comprehensive and truthful record of the society of the feudal age in Europe. The number of Old French texts, already published is large, and includes virtually all the varieties of literary form: the epic, history, poems of court life, fables, lyrics of many kinds, satires, imitations of antiquity, translations from the Greek and the Latin, sermons, mysteries, farces, folk-tales, romances of adventure, scientific treatises, etc. Surely, in this vast mass of texts, any one can find what he seeks, be his quest literary or philological. Students of history, customs, folk-lore, religion, archæology, find in these records some of the most unstudied and significant utterances of the human mind. Among those of us whose interests are mainly linguistic and literary, there should be discernable by this time a consensus of opinion as to what texts are best for our purpose. It goes without

saying that, in the supposed best universities of the world, the interest which dominates all others in the study of Old French is philological rather than literary. This condition seems likely to endure for at least another generation. A reversal of present interests can only come through a more widespread and accurate pursuit of comparative literature, call it by what name you will. That this reversal will, in large degree at least, take place, cannot be doubted. Many of the linguistic phenomena of the language have already received careful and adequate treatment, whereas the hundred and one interesting and vital questions to be elucidated by a correct application of comparative literature in connection with Old French, have many of them to be discussed for the first time. It is unfortunate that in gathering the data here presented, it was not possible to distinguish the texts used for philological purposes from those used for literary purposes.

To obtain a fair idea of what texts were being actually used for instruction in Old French, questions were sent to the professors concerned in a large number of the supposed best universities in the world. It was found necessary to leave out some of the greatest institutions because the subject was not taught. An undue proportion of the universities consulted were American. This was by reason of the close interest which we of course feel in the institutions of higher learning in this country. No reliance whatever was placed on catalogue announcements, since they are subject to such frequent change, but the professors addressed were asked to state what texts they had actually used during the year 1900-1, the year 1901-2, and what texts they intended to use during the current year,—1902-3. The data gathered represents, then, the texts actually employed during the first three years of the century. Nearly all of the replies, be it said, went minutely into the matter, giving not only the texts used, but the chrestomathies<sup>1</sup> and grammars as well. Of the

<sup>1</sup> Although the scope of this inquiry did not include chrestomathies, it may be interesting to observe that those most in use are, in order: Paris-Langlois, Förster-Koschwitz, Bartsch, and Constans.

fifty-seven universities from which answers were received, six are in France, two in Switzerland, nineteen in Germany, seven in Austria-Hungary, one each in Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and Sweden, and nineteen in the United States. The names of these universities are not here given, for evident reasons. The results gain, rather than lose by this omission. To sum up, the statistics here given present the names of the texts actually used for the teaching of Old French in fifty-seven of the supposed best universities of the world during the years 1900-1903.

The texts most employed are, in order: *La Chanson de Roland*, used sixty times in the three years; Chrétien de Troies, forty-six times; *Aucassin et Nicolette*, thirty-six times; Marie de France, eighteen times; *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, fourteen times. After this first group of prime favorites, come: *La Vie de St. Alexis*, read six times; *Aliscans*, four times; *Robin et Marion*, four times; *Ajol*, *Le Jeu d'Adam*, and *Raoul de Cambrai*, three times each.<sup>1</sup>

It will be observed that the texts most read are in verse, save *Aucassin et Nicolette*, which alternates prose and verse. One might have foreseen that the *Roland* would be the most frequently read, and we are all glad that this proves to be the case. The *Roland* has been used thirty-three times in some one of the complete editions, twenty-seven in the partial edition of G. Paris, which contains 815 lines. As for Chrétien de Troies, this poet may well feel flattered that his works, after so many centuries, stand next to the *Roland* in the brilliant galaxy of one of the richest and most varied of literatures. Something like the present conditions of popularity between the two first favorites may have existed before, at some forgotten moment in their long rivalry. Chrétien has been read forty-six times. His most read poem seems to

<sup>1</sup> It is needless to observe that the price of the various texts has a great deal to do with the frequency of their use. This is seen clearly in the fact that two thirds of the texts reported as having been read during the three years cost five francs or less.

be the *Yvain*, used nineteen times, as against thirteen for the *Cligès*, ten for *Erec et Enide*, and two for the *Charette*. The third favorite, *Aucassin et Nicolette* can never have enjoyed its present relative vogue at any previous age. Charming as it is, the work of the *viel caitif* bears many marks which indicate that it can never have been immensely popular. It seems to have been written in a nook, far removed from the great highways of contemporary thought and action, and transmits to our own day the distinctly personal note of its gentle author. Some suppose the present vogue of *Aucassin et Nicolette* to be a fad, but such is not the case. Its popularity is, for the most part, a pure literary enthusiasm, based upon the existence in the chantefable of a delicate and bewitching beauty, a sweet and melancholy charm, which, once felt, can never be forgotten. The future will show for many generations an increasing number of devoted readers of this exquisite masterpiece. The fourth favorite is Marie de France, whose *lais* have been used sixteen times, the fables twice. Next comes the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, used fourteen times. There is nothing surprising in the popularity of this poem. From the literary standpoint, it possesses a flavor quite its own, and is probably the oldest example extant of the peculiar genius of Paris. On the other hand, the work is of great philological interest, in spite of the disappearance of the unique manuscript in which it was preserved.

These five works form a group apart, and are followed only at a long interval by the second group. The *Vie de St. Alexis* has been read six times. Few poems offer more interesting problems to the critic than this, which enjoys the additional advantage of being accessible in the superb edition of G. Paris.<sup>1</sup> It is at first surprising to note that *Aliscans*, generally classed second to the *Roland*, has been

<sup>1</sup> One of the last evidences of the activity of the great Master is: *La Vie de St. Alexis, nouvelle éd.*, Emile Bouillon, 1903, 63 pp.

read but four times.<sup>1</sup> This is because of the difficulty of procuring copies of the poem. The editions of Jonckbloet and of Guessard have long been exhausted, and that of Rolin does not offer a satisfactory text. All of this is the more regrettable, because the epic not only possesses genuine power, but offers a series of absorbing problems, whose solution bids fair to attract the attention of scholars for years to come. *Ajol*, the most charming perhaps of the romans d'aventure, has been used only three times. It would have enjoyed a greater popularity, if, like the majority of its rivals, it had been preserved in several manuscripts. Under the circumstances, it is inferior to many poems for philological research. The same remark may be made of *Raoul de Cambrai*, which exists in but one manuscript. This great epic, remarkable among other things for the psychological development of its plot, has been read only three times, and even this slight degree of popularity is to be curtailed, for the edition of the Société des Anciens Textes is now exhausted.

Examining the two groups of texts most read, we find only three genuine epics in the list,—the *Roland*, *Aliscans*, and *Raoul de Cambrai*. As it happens, each of the three gestes into which the Old French epic is generally divided is represented by one poem. The number of separate works in these two groups, counting the four poems of Chrétien, each once, and allowing two units for the works read of Marie, is fifteen. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of three monuments which date from the eleventh century, the great majority of the works named in these two groups are of the twelfth century.

A complete list of all other texts used during the three years would be of little value. Some of the most significant are here mentioned: *Aspremont*, *Amis et Amiles*, *Auberi le Bourguignon*, *Berte aus grans Piés*, *Beuve de Hanstone*,

<sup>1</sup> See the statement of G. Paris, *Romania*, v, p. 110: "*Aliscans*, que plusieurs critiques n'hésitent pas à mettre à côté du *Roland*."

A new edition of this epic is being prepared by three of Suchier's pupils.

*Charroi de Nismes, Covenant Vivien, Isembart et Gormond, Jeu de Nicolas, Philip de Thaün: Bestiaire, Cumpoz, Quatre Livres des Rois, Roman de Troies, Brut, Vie de St. Louis.*

The following additional comments may be of interest. Comparatively few of the texts mentioned seem to have been read entire. Especially is this true, as might be expected, in centres where philology, not literature, is the main pursuit. In a number of cases, relatively obscure texts have been used, because the professors concerned happened to be working on them with a view to editing. To study even an obscure text in this way, is of the greatest value at times, since it permits of an object lesson in criticism. Several things of interest are to be noted in the matter of national preferences as indicated by the data gathered. For instance, Marie de France was read only in the United States during the three years under examination. Her poems were read eighteen times. A partial explanation of this surprising fact is found in the careful study given Marie for a number of years in one university which has furnished a bountiful proportion of those now teaching Romance philology in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Again, *Adam de la Halle* has been read only in Austria and Germany. The choice of texts used in France would of course be of the highest interest. The texts read in nearly all French universities are determined by the needs of candidates for the license and the agrégation, and are taken from the fragments published in the *Chrestomathie* of Paris and Langlois. It follows from this that few works of any length are read entire in French schools, unless at the University of Paris, where the number of courses is large. By reason of these facts, it was deemed wise to leave French universities out of consideration in the present inquiry, save only the University of Paris. It is interesting to note, however, the choice of fragments most read in French universities in the volume of Paris and

<sup>1</sup> With four exceptions, all the teachers using the works of Marie studied at the university in question.

Langlois. They are: the *Roland*, the *Couronnement Louis*, the *Pèlerinage*, the *Chevalier au Lyon*, *Aymeri de Narbonne*, the *Raoul*. The situation of France is indeed unique in having such a choice of patriotic poems as this for her youth to read.

To return to the matter of national preferences as indicated in the texts most used, what country reads the largest proportion of epic literature in Old French? It goes without saying that the answer to this question would be France, were it possible to eliminate the above-mentioned conditions which make it difficult if not impossible to draw a true comparison between France and the other countries under examination. Leaving France out, then, we find that the largest per cent. of purely epic poems is read in Germany, where 45 per cent. of all the texts used belong to this category.<sup>1</sup> The per cent. for the United States is 37, for Austria-Hungary, 20. Again, the relative amounts read of the *poésie courtoise* is interesting and suggestive. Austria reads the largest proportion of this style of literature, 57 per cent. of the total. The United States comes next with 33 per cent., and Germany last with only 20 per cent. That Germany uses the largest proportion of purely epic texts and the smallest proportion of poems drawn from the *poésie courtoise*, will come as a surprise to many. Germany is the fatherland of philology, and the epic texts, one might suppose, would not thrive in such an atmosphere. Indeed, it is much easier to keep the attention of students upon the dry facts of philology in reading one of the court poems than in reading the *Roland* or the *Raoul*, where the imagination is constantly fired by magnificent or terrible scenes. It is likely that the proportion of epic literature read in Germany has been increasing of recent years. It is likely, too, that the character of the literature now being read in the American universities

<sup>1</sup>The selections read in chrestomathies are of course not taken into account. It may be observed in passing that relatively few epic selections in the chrestomathies seem to be read in Germany.



represents that read ten or fifteen years ago in Germany. Our relation to Germany in the study of Old French has, in the past, been distinctly that of a province. How many professors in this country are still reading with their students the same texts that they read long ago in Germany, or, if not the same, texts of the very same general character ! One who was fed in his infancy on Chrétien de Troies and Marie de France will continue to demand similar nourishment as long as he graces a professor's chair. In view of the nature of the texts that seem to be most used at present in Germany, and in view of the fact that American students in Romance are going more and more to France for preparation, the general character of the texts that will be most employed in America a generation hence will undoubtedly show a considerable change.

Of the other European nations examined, Holland shows a decided preference for the poésie courtoise, while Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland show a preference for the epic poems.

It is foreign to the purpose of this brief inquiry to moralize upon the evidence disclosed. Nonetheless, one may be pardoned for expressing regret that any student of Old French should be allowed to leave the subject without ever having read, either in class or out of class, at least one epic poem. To neglect this is to leave on the student's mind a regrettable impression. He will have known only some one of the more arid or artificial productions of the language, and the chances are many to one that he will never learn to appreciate at their true value the grand and significant monuments of the epic literature. The world has long been accused, and with justice, of taking from French literature, if not the worst, at least not the best. One who reads only the *Renart*, or Chrétien de Troies, delightful as these productions are in many ways, will have derived genuine knowledge and profit, but he will unfortunately not have become acquainted with French character in some of its most essential qualities. He will perhaps be inclined unconsciously to deny to France

many grand and lovable qualities which are written on a thousand pages of her old epics, and without which she could not have continued to exist. Be this as it may, it stands to reason that the true scholar will know intimately all phases of the literature he expounds. If he can know only one phase, it should be the greatest and the best. We may well rejoice that one-third of the texts in Old French now being read in the universities are epic poems.

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